

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 742

By Sargent

A RESOLUTION to honor and commend Jimmy Gentry World War II veteran and acclaimed storyteller.

WHEREAS, our nation was conceived by individuals who were willing to sacrifice their personal safety and concerns to ensure our individual and collective freedom, and the Volunteer State is especially proud to be the home of so many valiant men and women who have performed above and beyond the call of duty; and

WHEREAS, thousands of Tennesseans have continued this time-honored tradition of volunteerism through service in the United States Armed Forces, and a number of these are members of our "Greatest Generation," having served in armed combat during World War II; and

WHEREAS, one such gallant veteran is Jimmy Gentry of Franklin, Tennessee, whose bountiful life reflects the experiences of so many men of his generation who left their rural hometowns to defend their country in World War II; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Gentry is an acclaimed storyteller who shares with his listeners the "simple but wonderful times" of his childhood, rural life during the Great Depression, and on through to the powerful experience of helping to liberate Dachau concentration camp survivors near the end of the war; and

WHEREAS, he returned home from the war and married his childhood sweetheart, Rebecca, became a high school teacher and football coach, and raised three sons; and

WHEREAS, in 1985, Jimmy Gentry received a phone call from a concentration camp survivor, asking if he would speak about what he saw at Dachau. For forty years, he had kept the painful memories of the war to himself and was reluctant to tell his story, but he agreed to meet the man who wanted to shake his hand; and

WHEREAS, the two men met, and again the man asked Mr. Gentry to share his story with others; in a recent interview, Mr. Gentry recalled that meeting, "He said to me, 'When you

die, nobody will ever know anything about what happened,'" and so, in 1986, Jimmy Gentry spoke to a group of students at Vanderbilt University; and

WHEREAS, he has since been asked to tell his story to civic groups, church congregations, and schools throughout the country, speaking, he said, "because my conscience tells me that I should do it"; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Gentry does not tell only the story of the liberation of Dachau, but instead aims to tell the story of "an American life," giving his rapt listeners a glimpse into a world long gone; and

WHEREAS, his stories are met with amazement from his audience, as evidenced by the thousands of letters he has received over the years, including one from a fifth-grader who wrote, "I can't wait to share your stories with friends and family. I think they will also be very interested and proud of all the things you have been through. You are a great speaker. I would love to hear more of your stories"; and

WHEREAS, such responses prompted him to write and publish his autobiography, titled, *An American Life*, in 2002; and

WHEREAS, this exceptional gentleman does more than speak and write about the simple American life of his childhood; he also helps kids re-create those times on his family's 400-acre farm where, each June for more than thirty years, the Gentry Farm has been turned into a summer camp for kids; and

WHEREAS, Jimmy Gentry and his late wife, Rebecca, lived on the farm that has been in Rebecca's family for eight generations, and today, 30,000 children every year visit that farm to pick pumpkins and strawberries, ride on a hay wagon, walk the land, or wade in the creek; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Gentry served his nation with courage and gallantry, and his bountiful life exemplifies the spirit and allegiance to family and community that are characteristic of a true Tennessean, now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED FIFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we hereby commend Jimmy Gentry for his brave and honorable service to a grateful nation during World War II, recognize his exceptional abilities as an oral historian and

engaging storyteller, and salute his unswerving commitment to living the examined life with courage and conviction.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.